

enough to be able to take that money wherever the parent may want their child to receive tutorial help. See, I'm a person who believes that parents know best when it comes to the interests of their child. And therefore, when we find a school that is persistently in failure, parents must be given different options. There has to be a consequence. Something has to happen if schools refuse to change and a child stays trapped in mediocrity. And one such consequence is to give parents the ability to send their child to a different school, public or private, as far as I'm concerned.

Another option, and something I strongly support, is for there to be competitive grant programs for opportunity scholarships. You know, in Washington, DC, we've got a terrible problem there in the public school system because it's not meeting standards. They're just simply not getting the job done in too many instances. And so I work with the mayor, a Democrat mayor—a Democratic mayor—who, by the way, believes what I believe, that when you find failure, you can't accept it. And so you know what we did? We put forth what's called opportunity scholarships for families of the poorer students, so their family, if the school isn't meeting needs, can afford to go to a different kind of school. What matters is the child getting the education. That's what matters most. And my attitude is, if there's persistent failure, it makes sense to liberate the parents so their child can have a better chance.

So here's some reforms I look forward to working with Congress on. This is a piece of legislation that is—it's vital for the country, in my judgment. It's working, and I think we ought to make sure it stays in law. And I'm looking forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats to get it done. I've reached out to the bill sponsors in 2001, Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, Congressman Miller of California, Congressman Boehner of Ohio, and Senator Gregg of New Hampshire. These four gentlemen worked with the White House the last time to get the bill done; we're in consultations now to get it reauthorized.

I'm pleased to report, we're all headed in the same direction. In Washington, when you get everybody like that headed in the same

direction, sometimes you can get some things done. Believe it or not, it is possible to put aside the sharp elbows of partisan politics and focus on what's right for the country. And in my strong opinion, the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind is right for the country, and that's what I've come to New Albany to tell you.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:38 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana, and his wife, Cheri Herman Daniels; former Representative Michael E. Sodrel and his wife, Keta; Mayor James E. Garner, Sr., of New Albany, IN; and Mayor Adrian M. Fenty of Washington, DC.

The President's Radio Address

March 2, 2007

Good morning. One of my most solemn experiences as President is visiting men and women recovering from wounds they suffered in defense of our country. Spending time with these wounded warriors is also inspiring, because so many of them bring the same courage they showed on the battlefield to their battle for recovery.

These service men and women deserve the thanks of our country, and they deserve the best care our Nation can provide. That is why I was deeply troubled by recent reports of substandard conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Most of the people working at Walter Reed are dedicated professionals. These fine doctors, nurses, and therapists care deeply about our wounded troops, and they work day and night to help them. Yet some of our troops at Walter Reed have experienced bureaucratic delays and living conditions that are less than they deserve. This is unacceptable to me; it is unacceptable to our country; and it's not going to continue.

On hearing the reports about Walter Reed, I asked Secretary of Defense Bob Gates to assess the situation firsthand and report back to me. He confirmed that there are real problems at Walter Reed, and he's taken action to hold people accountable, including relieving the general in charge of the facility. Secretary Gates has also formed an independent review group that will investigate how this

situation was allowed to happen, how it can be fixed, and how we can prevent it from happening again. Walter Reed has a long tradition of outstanding medical service, and my administration will ensure that the soldiers recovering there are treated with the dignity and respect they have earned.

As we work to improve conditions at Walter Reed, we're also taking steps to find out whether similar problems have occurred at other military and veterans hospitals. So I'm announcing that my administration is creating a bipartisan Presidential commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the care America is providing our wounded service men and women. This review will examine their treatment from the time they leave the battlefield through their return to civilian life as veterans, so we can ensure that we are meeting their physical and mental health needs. In the coming days, I will announce the members of this commission and set a firm deadline for them to report back to me with their recommendations.

We will use the commission's recommendations as part of our ongoing effort to improve our service to our Nation's veterans. Since 2001, we've helped over one million more veterans take advantage of the VA health care system, and with my 2008 budget proposal, we will have increased the VA's health care budget by 83 percent over the past 6 years, from about \$20 billion to more than \$36 billion. Overall, I'm asking Congress for more than \$86 billion for veterans' services this year. If Congress approves my request, this would amount to a 77-percent increase since I took office and the highest level of support for veterans in American history.

The men and women recovering at Walter Reed and our other military hospitals are remarkable individuals. Many have suffered wounds that even time will never fully heal. Yet they're facing the future with optimism and a determination to move forward with their lives.

One of these brave warriors is Army Specialist Eduardo Leal-Cardenas. He was injured when an improvised explosive device blew up his vehicle in Iraq. The blast shattered bones in both legs, broke his ribs, and broke his back and neck. Some questioned

whether he would ever regain the ability to walk. There was no doubt in Eduardo's mind, and he began his rehab while still bedridden. Today, he's left Walter Reed, he's walking again, and he has something else he is proud of—during his recovery, Eduardo became a U.S. citizen. I was proud to be with him at Walter Reed when he took his citizenship oath. If you ask Eduardo what American citizenship means to him, he answers with just one word: "Freedom."

Our Nation is blessed to have so many fine Americans who are willing to serve. We're blessed to have so many compassionate volunteers who give their time to care for our injured soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. We're blessed to have so many fine medical professionals who dedicate their lives to healing our troops. This country has a moral obligation to provide our service men and women with the best possible care and treatment. They deserve it, and they will get it.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 a.m. on March 2 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 2.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

February 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The White House announced that the President and Mrs. Bush will host King Abdallah II and Queen Rania of Jordan for a private dinner at the White House on March 6.